

How should universities play the game? Role of the academic sector in sport for development and peace in South Africa

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Abstract

Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) refers to the use of sport to promote varied outcomes on and beyond the playing field. It encompasses a range of initiatives and stakeholders including multilateral agencies, governments and civil society. While multiple benefits may be achieved through sport, critics cite a lack of rigorous research, monitoring and evaluation and urge against oversimplified notions of sport. The academic sector, with expertise in research, teaching and learning, is well positioned to fill this gap. This study contributes to SDP as an emerging field by exploring the role(s) of the academic sector, in particular universities. The study focuses on South Africa, with an overview of the policy environment and institutional arrangements for Sport and Recreation. The study analyses the way in which various South African universities are engaged in SDP. Qualitative methods of data collection were used, including key informant interviews, focus group discussions, desk-top review and document analysis. The study found academic institutions can strengthen research, teaching and learning in SDP and help inform evidence-based practice and policy. Better collaboration is needed within and between the academic sector, government and civil society as well as an improved North-South exchange for universities.

Introduction

This article is part of a larger study that explores the roles of the state, civil society and academic sector in Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), with literature complimented by comparative case studies of each sector in South Africa. The role(s) universities play (and can play) with key stakeholders in SDP is explored, including research, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), teaching and learning, capacity building, policy and advocacy. Empirical research centres exist at various academic institutions in South Africa, including the University of the Western Cape (UWC), University of Cape Town (UCT), University of Stellenbosch (US), the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) and the University of Johannesburg (UJ), which have been selected for this study.

A debate on the role of universities cannot occur without clarifying the relationship between universities, civil society and the state. Good governance, including effective and strong collaboration between government entities, and between the State and civil society is essential

for the success of development initiatives (Giese & Sanders, 2008). In South Africa, cooperative governance is a central tenet of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). Section 41 calls on all spheres of government and organs of state to co-operate by fostering friendly relations, assisting and supporting one another, informing one another, consulting on matters of common interest, and co-ordinating actions and legislation. The role of universities in SDP is interconnected to the role of the State and civil society.

The academic sector refers to higher education establishments, such as tertiary institutions and training colleges, and excludes formal primary and secondary schooling (Scott *et al.*, 2007). Higher education establishments provide academic programmes and expertise. Technically this sector is part of civil society and sits largely outside state control. It is vital to note that education is a continuum and tertiary institutions are influenced by the success of primary and secondary schooling beforehand, among other factors. The challenges that continue to plague public schools in South Africa may therefore impact the tertiary sector, including its possible role in SDP.

Background

It is important to consider the overall role of universities in development and peace before debating their role in SDP. While international development and cooperation has largely been seen as the domain of government, civil society and aid agencies, universities are gaining increasing recognition globally as stakeholders, who can make valuable contributions (Neave, 2000; Unceta, 2007). Similarly, universities themselves are beginning to envisage broader roles related to such issues (Zezeza & Olukoshi, 2004; Keim *et al.*, 2011). This is pertinent given globalisation and the increasing interconnectedness and complexity of development. Daniel Sanders (1994:51) stated:

The role of universities in peace and social development has to be viewed in the context of pressing global problems and the central issue of human survival in an increasingly interdependent world... It is also presumptuous to think that any one institution or group by itself – be it the United Nations, the non-governmental organisations or universities – could deal with problems that are unprecedented in terms of increases in rate, scale and complexity.

However, while universities can play a role in international development, there are significant, and often, conflicting differences among universities both within, and between countries and regions, including the 'North-South divide' (Preece, 2009). Furthermore, it is important to note that divides also exist within the Global South (and North) and South Africa is no exception with the highest Gini Coefficient in the world (World Bank, 2015). These inequities are reflected among universities, with the greatest concentration of tertiary institutions and associated research in Gauteng and the Western Cape, provinces with greater access to resources than other provinces. As such, certain universities and regions within South Africa do not receive as much recognition as others, an issue which needs to be addressed locally and globally. In addition, it is increasingly difficult and problematic to distinguish between the North and South developed and developing nations. Nonetheless, Arrighi *et al.* (2003) argue that widespread convergence in the degree of industrialisation

between former First and Third World countries over the past four decades has *not* been associated with convergence in regard to income levels that remain skewed. Thus, one must note that significant differences remain in regard to resources, status and knowledge production between universities located in the global North versus the South. As Keim and De Coning (2015) point out, three times as many scientific papers are published per person in Western Europe, North America, and Japan, than in any other region.

Additionally, universities vary greatly in terms of philosophy, mission, tradition, level of education, as well as the degree to which they emphasise research, learning, teaching, service, programming and community outreach (Keim *et al.*, 2011). Nonetheless, it seems that the major expected role of universities lies in the production and transfer of knowledge to ensure that practitioners and policymakers can use this knowledge to inform policies, plans and projects.

An inherent risk is that not all knowledge and technology may be beneficial for development. Conflict theorists would argue that much research and knowledge production is used to protect vested interests of an economic, industrialised elite (Rydin, 2007). On the contrary, research and knowledge production can be conducted in a participatory manner, with the very communities and people that development projects are intended to serve. Fals Borda and Rahman (1991) claim that serving both academic and community needs is possible, more ethical yet more time-consuming. While universities are intended to possess a sense of academic freedom, it must be realised that they are increasingly subject to political pressure and external forces (Sanders, 1994).

Despite clear differences, it is clear that a common objective for universities in an interconnected global order is internationalisation. In higher education, this can be seen as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2003:2). This results in increasing connections between universities in different parts of the globe, including the recruitment and transfer of international students, exchange programmes for staff and students and internationalisation (some may say westernisation) of curricula and teaching methods (Khorsandi, 2014). This development has precipitated global competition among institutions. While internationalisation may stimulate inter-university learning and possible sharing of resources and best practices, it has been critiqued for increasing inequalities across universities and regions, reducing higher education to a commodity within a reductionist economic model (De Wit, 2011). This can result in universities being preoccupied with international positioning and status, including a distorted emphasis on international publications, possibly losing touch with local needs and realities.

Universities in the SDP Field

Despite these challenges, universities can still fulfil a critical function in SDP, working with civil society and the State. Keim *et al.* (2011) identified various ways in which universities can play a role in SDP, including research, monitoring and evaluation; teaching, training and capacity-building; skills and knowledge transfer to civil society and stakeholders; community

outreach, engagement and development; technical assistance from experts and specialists; stimulating critical thinking around issues of sport, development and peace; partnerships, collaboration among and between universities and civil society; publication of best practices and challenges to inform better programming; and academic freedom and objectivity in evaluating SDP.

Expanding on the above, a common critique of SDP is the lack of evidence base, rigorous research and poorly conceptualised theories of change. Market research has shown that all stakeholders in SDP, whether practitioners or funders, see evaluation and information as a barrier to setting up, running and supporting initiatives (Beyond Sport *et al.*, 2010). A lack of information and evaluation is a key barrier for corporates to supporting SDP programmes (as opposed to other programmes) with 41% of corporates identifying this challenge. Similarly, this barrier affects the ability of international federations and NGOs to attract support and funding for their work. Results from the Beyond Sport report (2010) indicated that 43% of international federations and 56% of NGOs surveyed identified information and evaluation of the outcomes of SDP programmes as a major barrier to attracting funding.

Research conducted at the 2005 Magglingen Conference demonstrated that university participants were more likely to critique SDP policies, plans and programmes (Rato & Ley, 2006). This critical independence gives universities a valuable ‘watchdog’ role to play in SDP though it is recognised universities may themselves have their own biases and/or external agendas. Universities have great potential to play an advocacy role and their ‘objectivity’ and critical independence may allow them to assist other SDP actors in influencing policy environments and strategic plans (Keim *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, universities may be best suited to bridge the gap between the State, civil society and academia, ultimately helping to institutionalise cooperative governance within the SDP sector (Keim & Groenewald, 2014).

Despite this, universities remain largely on the side lines of SDP. While various conferences and fora have been convened by universities in the last decade, their involvement tends to be limited to theoretical discourse and an advisory role. Universities are conspicuous by their absence in the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) Report, “Harnessing the Power of Sport for Development and Peace”. They are not included in the twenty-five recommendations for government nor as key stakeholders in the peace building matrix, which makes mention of community leaders, teachers, coaches and top athletes, heads of NGOs, the United Nations and government organisations (SDPIWG, 2008:234).

It seems universities have been neglected and/or are unwilling to engage deeply in this field. Van Eekeren (2006:1) claims that until recently SDP research was seen as “academic suicide”. While this has changed over the last two decades, partly due to the internationalisation of SDP and of universities, two simultaneous but interconnected processes, sport is often stigmatised as less worthy of rigorous research. Nixon and Frey (1996:1) claim people eulogise about sporting conquests but “their eyes often seem to glaze over when sport is mentioned in the same breath as economics, politics, poverty, pollution, racial and gender discrimination, crime or the quality of education”. Furthermore, much research around sport is centred on

sport management, sport science, nutrition, psychology and high performance rather than SDP.

The divide between the Global North and South is pronounced in SDP. While most programmes occur in the Global South, the reality remains that most knowledge production resides in the North and there are few examples of genuine North-South partnerships (Lindsey *et al.*, 2015). Cynical observers may argue organisations in the South are expected to deliver grassroots work for North based actors to conduct ‘new’ research and /or maintain existing patterns of power, privilege and inequality (Keim & De Coning, 2015).

Universities and SDP in South Africa

The South African National Sport and Recreation Plan (NSRP) outlines an integrated national sport and recreation system with an M&E framework. The SRSA (2012:64) states “there should be only two macro drivers of sport and recreation in the country, namely Government (all 3 spheres) and one NGO (South African Sport Confederation and Olympic Committee [SASCOC])”. The NSRP positions government as responsible for: policy, legislation and infrastructure; creating an enabling environment for all to partake in sport and recreation; and promoting and developing the sports economy and industry in all its facets. SASCOC is responsible for leading civil society in translating policy into action; implementing policy, creating programmes in a system of good governance; and acting as an umbrella body for the overall sport sector. However, there is an inherent danger in SASCOC leading and/or representing the multiple stakeholders that make up civil society, including the academic sector, NGOs, faith-based organisations, student groups, political parties etc. Further, SASCOC has primarily focused on the output of sporting federations, especially national teams, meaning it has a skewed focus on elite sport. While the NSRP acknowledges that the scope of SASCOC needs to change given the new institutional arrangements, the confederation may find it difficult to articulate all the needs of civil society, especially the academic sector.

As such, universities are barely noted in the NSRP. There is no articulation of the value of the academic sector and it is conspicuous by its absence in the demarcation of roles and responsibilities. There is brief mention of the role university sport has to play, but this undermines the inherent strength of the academic sector in providing scientific research, rigorous evidence and M&E, all of which allow it to influence policy and advocate strongly for SDP. The lack of reference in the NSRP does not mean that universities are not part of SDP in South Africa. Many tertiary institutions contribute meaningfully to the discourse, including regular conferences and fora convened by universities, as well as research networks. Furthermore, a number of academic staff continue to advise the state on their sport and recreation policy, including SDP.

Research problem

The study focuses on South Africa, with an overview of the policy environment and institutional arrangements for Sport and Recreation. An analysis of the way in which various South African universities are engaged in Sport for Development and Peace

(SDP), forms the major content. It is intended to contribute to SDP as an emerging field by exploring the role(s) that can be played by the academic sector, in particular, universities.

Research methodology

Table 1. UNIVERSITIES SELECTED AND RELATION TO SDP

University	Status/History	Focus area in sport
University of the Western Cape (UWC) (2010)	Founded in 1960 as a constituent college. Gained university status in 1970. (ICESSD, 2016)	Interdisciplinary Centre dedicated exclusively to sport and development across Africa and has conducted much research in sport, development and peace. Provides teaching and learning in Sport and Development and Peace (ICESSD) including an international Diploma in Sport & Exercise Science (SRES)
University of Cape Town (UCT) (2016)	Founded in 1829, ranked Africa's leading teaching and research institution	Centre dedicated to Sport Science, Nutrition and High Performance (SISSA) Teaching of Sport Management
University of Stellenbosch (US) (2016)	Founded in 1864 and became an Afrikaans language university	Centre dedicated to Sport Science and a research journal in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation
Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) (2016)	University of Technology with ±32,000 students. Established in 2005 when Cape Technikon and Peninsula Technikon merged. Has roots in the Cape Technical College, founded in 1920.	Offers a range of diplomas and degrees related to sport management and marketing.
University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) (2016a&b)	Founded in 1896. Now a multi-campus public research university situated in central Johannesburg	Operates a FIFA (<i>Fédération Internationale de Football Association</i>) accredited Centre for Exercise Science and Sports Medicine.
University of Johannesburg (UJ)	Founded in 1967 (as Rand Afrikaans University). Four campuses and ±48,000 students, following a merger in 2005.	Olympic Studies Centre and has conducted much research in sport and development issues.

SDP=Sport for Development and Peace

Research setting

South Africa boasts 26 universities. Five out of the six universities in this study are ranked in the top seven South African universities (Webometrics, 2016). A brief overview of these universities is listed in Table 1. While the institutions may not focus primarily on SDP, they incorporate elements of SDP into their work. All the universities boast sport infrastructure and competition and some offer sport-based community outreach.

Ethical clearance

Permission and ethics clearance (Registration no.: 15/6/2) were obtained from the Senate Research Committee at UWC. Further permission was obtained from research participants who provided signed and informed consent.

Research approach

This study uses a qualitative case study approach to ascertain the role(s) of universities in SDP in South Africa. A case study was undertaken of UWC, UCT, US, CPUT, WITS and UJ and their activities in the SDP field. The population includes key stakeholders at these institutions and other experts.

Data collection methods

This involved a document and online review of the work of the universities, including meeting minutes, evaluations and reports. Key informant interviews and focus groups were held with academic staff and other SDP experts. Open-ended questions with a purpose rather than formal events with predetermined responses (Marshall & Rossman, 1994) were used to investigate specific outcomes based on the approach of Taplin *et al.* (2013).

Analysis of data

Qualitative analysis accompanied by data collection were the two processes that tend to occur simultaneously. Focus groups were analysed using case study procedures (Creswell *et al.* 2007) starting with the transcription of information from audio-tape recordings. Analysis included reading transcripts several times to identify recurrent and most important themes (Popay *et al.*, 2006). An independent researcher read transcripts and created themes (for comparison) thus increasing the validity and reliability of the categorising. Prolonged engagement, persistent observation and member checks applied. The research design can be modified for varied settings and is not limited to one case study (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The research will be disseminated with participants and key stakeholders in order for them to use findings.

Delimitation and limitations

The scope of the study has the following delimitations. Firstly, it focuses primarily on South Africa, though it is hoped the findings are relevant for a broader audience. Secondly, it focuses on universities though it must be noted the academic sector is much broader. Furthermore, it has selected six of the largest and most influential universities for the study, though there are a total of 26 universities in the country, differing in scope, scale and size. Lastly, the study focuses only on universities in the Western Cape and Gauteng, and excludes other sites.

Results

While much research in SDP has focused on the individual outcomes of programmes, little attention has been paid to organisational and institutional outcomes among key stakeholders (Coalter, 2010; Coakley, 2014). Findings illustrate universities face a range of opportunities and challenges in SDP, and can play a role in strengthening the field, in relation

to research and M&E; policy and agenda setting; teaching, learning and professional preparation; community development and ensuring that principles translate into best practices.

Research, monitoring and evaluation

Universities can make a major contribution in lending academic expertise and capacitating SDP actors to conduct scientific research. Burnett (2016) and others feel universities are well suited to conduct high level systems research and not only programmatic assessments. In addition, universities can assist with participatory and ethical processes related to research in SDP. We need universities to help with research so that we can build an evidence base. This is especially important as sport for development is an emerging field. (Government official)

Universities can do much to bolster the capacity of SDP actors to better monitor and evaluate their work, and better communicate results internally and externally. SDP actors identified the need for “improved reporting, including better data collection and improved quality of information” (Collins & Mungal, 2016:interview). This is seen as necessary for funding and donor/sponsor relations (external) and improved programmes and operations (internal).

Policy and agenda setting

Universities have a unique role to play in policy and advocacy. While SDP actors often lobby the State to include SDP in national development policies and strategies, this is far more effective when results have been verified externally, where universities fit the bill perfectly with their ‘critical independence’. A notable example is the Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport (DCAS) that commissioned a university to produce a ‘Case for Sport’ report which was used to successfully lobby provincial treasury for funding (Bouah, 2016). The Department works with universities to convene a regular annual conference to bridge the divides between practitioners and academics.

Teaching, learning and professional preparation

All institutions surveyed offer academic programmes and services related to sport. However, as with many other universities globally and linked to the internationalisation of higher education, the focus tends to be sport science, high performance sport, sport nutrition, sport management and administration. Nonetheless, there is an increased portfolio of diplomas and degrees related to SDP, including a number of courses and qualifications offered internationally.

If universities only teach subjects tied to the business of sport, then graduates won’t get jobs. Development has more opportunities and the need is greater. It must be included. (Government official)

Community development

While the strength of universities lies in research, teaching and learning, there is no need for institutions to be limited in this regard. Many universities run community outreach projects, often on campus, that can be connected to SDP.

Universities have a standing in communities and a resource base of staff and students who may be mobilised to both deliver and receive SDP interventions in a powerful manner. (P. Singh, 2016:interview)

Universities pride themselves on their sports teams, though this may fall more in the realm of elite sport. However, as Bouah (2016) argues, universities can also contribute to SDP by enabling others to use their facilities and resources.

From principle to practice

Interactions among universities and practitioners illustrate the gap that can exist between principle and practice in global development, including SDP. Universities should not function as ivory towers removed from communities.

We need to build evidence and theory in the Global South, including Africanisation of curricula. We cannot not just oppose the Global North. (Academic)

Discussion

It is clear universities can add value to SDP in areas, such as research, M&E, policy and agenda setting, teaching, learning, professional preparation and community development, including service and outreach. Internationalisation presents a challenge and opportunity to institutions, which need to ensure they respond to local community needs while competing in a global world order.

Keim *et al.* (2011) argue that academic and intellectual discourse must be translated into tangible learning for practitioners, who may have many of the answers they seek. Universities should not use a social control and deficit-reduction model (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012) in which practitioners are seen as lacking skills or knowledge. This is equally relevant with regard to interaction among universities. While the practice of north-driven funders dictating terms of development to south-based organisations needs to change quickly (Darnell, 2007), universities in the Global North and South can form equitable partnerships. Lessons of experience can be shared and there is a clear need for universities in the global south to produce more SDP graduates. On this note, it is encouraging that certain South African universities are partnering with Global North institutions to offer joint SDP qualifications. Hopefully others will follow to ensure more academics are produced in areas where SDP initiatives are most needed, allowing for greater cultural sensitivity and a better balance between the need for academic rigour and local relevance.

As mentioned, there are clear divides between universities in South Africa. The latest QS World University Ranking shows the top fields of study at South Africa's best universities. Sport is not listed as a stand-alone subject, let alone SDP, but South African universities show expertise in development studies. "South African institutions receive their highest rankings in the new subject of Development Studies, in which University of Cape Town is 7th worldwide, and

University of The Witwatersrand ties for 15th” (Webometrics, 2016:online). While this is promising, it is crucial that imbalances in power and production of knowledge among tertiary institutions are addressed to ensure greater diversity and inclusivity of voices that may too play a role in SDP.

Academic research is likely to hold more value when accompanied by experiences from the field. In this sense, universities can both deliver and evaluate SDP programmes, though delivering services may reduce their ‘objective’ advantage. It is thus recommended that universities maintain their focus along their lines of expertise in providing academic support and experimental methodology in data collection and analysis (Collins & Mungal, 2016). If universities venture into programme delivery, it should be to critically analyse methodologies and develop effective strategies to enhance the SDP field, including equipping students with practical experience, rather than the delivery of programmes. This is crucial so as not to duplicate the work of civil society and blur roles and responsibilities of the various actors within SDP.

A challenge for universities is that sport and physical education, including SDP, is often not taken seriously in academia. As such, SDP research is often underfunded and remains the domain of a sport department only, when SDP outcomes can be much broader including business, health, education and more. Consequently, it is clear that universities must adopt an interdisciplinary approach as other disciplines can lend considerable expertise, while SDP will strengthen if other development actors realise the value of sport beyond the playing field.

Universities may assist practitioners and funding agencies alike to understand that measuring social change is complex and that hard targets may be the best way to appease investors, but not always the most effective way to measure and/or understand change. Universities can assist practitioners, frequently located in the global south, to better measure, explain and reflect their work, while also ensuring that funders, agencies and academics, often based in the global north, are able to better understand possible complexities and contradictions of SDP work.

Practical application and recommendations

There are seven practical applications and recommendations for universities that are evident from this research. Universities should play to their inherent strengths in research, teaching and learning in the following ways:

1. Use these strengths to improve programmes rather than delivering them directly and support the State in terms of regulating SDP through legislation, policy and creating an enabling environment;
2. Lobby and advocate for greater investment in SDP;
3. Promote an interdisciplinary approach by working across university faculties and with partners in the field;
4. Bridge the gap between principle and practice, managing the tension between delivering high-brow publications and doing relevant practical research in the field;

5. Share research with beneficiaries, implementing partners and stakeholders (including other universities), so that results are publicly available, useable and not duplicated unnecessarily;
6. Ensure ethical considerations are adhered to; and
7. Ensure sporting opportunities are available to all students and staff, regardless of race, gender, ability or any other status.

Conclusion

The academic sector can play a major role in SDP given the lack of rigorous evidence cited by proponents of SDP. Universities can strengthen research and evidence-based practice and assist with the institutionalisation of results-based M&E systems. Universities can promote a culture of teaching and learning, including ethical, participatory research among practitioners, while remaining a critical and independent voice for policy and advocacy purposes.

International aid agencies, national states, regional and local governments, and civil society actors, including the non-profit sector, need to better recognise the unique ability of universities to strengthen them as institutions and drive the SDP sector forward. There is no point in universities existing for their own sake, as they should also be committed to serve human causes. The academic sector needs to engage more beneficially with practitioners and stakeholders to ensure efforts in the classroom are aligned to the needs of communities, who should be involved fully in these processes. The academic sector should also recognise, value and appreciate its potential community engagement impact, including SDP, besides its research focus. There needs to be closer collaboration between universities, government and civil society to ensure everyone is on the same playing field.

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